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LETTER DATED 22 FEBRUARY 1999 FROM THE CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES A.I.
OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF SIERRA LEONE TO THE UNITED NATIONS
ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to convey herewith a document entitled "Address to the nation" (see annex), which President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah delivered in Freetown on Sunday, 21 February 1999.

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Fode M. DABOR
Ambassador
Deputy Permanent Representative
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex

Address to the nation, Sunday, 21 February 1999

Fellow citizens,

Exactly two weeks ago, I spoke to you about the security situation following the ruthless invasion of our capital city by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels and their allies. I assured you that the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), our civil defence and other loyal forces had succeeded in driving the invaders out of the city, and that our forces were on top of the situation.

Today, considering what we have been through, we can confidently say that the worst is over in Freetown and its environs. I can also say the same for some other parts of the country where, despite sporadic but calculated attempts by the rebels and their allies to unleash terror and destruction on innocent people, we are making progress in repelling the joint internal and external aggression. We should have no doubt whatsoever that today Sierra Leone is safer than it has been for a while.

However, we cannot afford to be complacent. We cannot afford to relax and say that life has returned to normal. These are not normal times. For as long as the rebels continue to attack our towns and villages, and kill and maim innocent people, the Government will not relent in its determination to defend every corner of this nation. Having said this, I must reiterate that my Government's attention is still focused on the search for a peaceful resolution of the crisis, although I am sure you do not wish me to surrender your rights to a handful of Sierra Leoneans and their foreign collaborators.

Experience has taught us that while the Government has primary responsibility for the safety and security of its people, we ourselves as individuals should also take some responsibility for our own safety. We can do so by being vigilant at all times, and by doing everything in our power to refrain from aiding and harbouring those armed elements whose primary objective is to destroy this country and deprive our children and grandchildren of their future. Let me emphasize once again that, notwithstanding the political initiatives that the Government has taken over the past three years, including my latest face-to-face dialogue with the RUF leader, Foday Sankoh, earlier this year, the priority of the Government has been, and will remain, the safety and security of the people of Sierra Leone.

When I spoke to you two weeks ago, I also told you that we had decided to take yet another major step forward towards lasting peace. I announced that although Foday Sankoh was still on trial in our courts, I had responded to the request that I allow him to meet face to face with other members of the RUF leadership, so that they could come up with a serious plan on how exactly they intend to pursue the peace process. My offer to allow him to meet them, at a suitable venue to be determined, still stands.

Meanwhile, we must let the rest of the world understand the real nature of this conflict - that this is not just another internal conflict in some small and distant developing country, but an armed rebellion, externally inspired and maintained, against the people of Sierra Leone and their democratically elected Government. We should let the rest of the world know that ECOMOG, our civil defence and other loyal forces are not trying to overthrow this or any other Government; that they are not demanding power and destroying, in the process, the lives and property of the very people whom they want to rule. They are not fighting or waging war against the people of Sierra Leone. On the contrary, ECOMOG, our civil defence and other loyal forces are acting only in self-defence. They are our defenders. Indeed, ECOMOG was authorized by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations Security Council to help protect us. On several occasions, the Council has itself commended, and rightly so, ECOMOG troops for the courage and determination they have demonstrated in their efforts to maintain security in Sierra Leone.

We must also let the rest of the world realize that the majority of the people of Sierra Leone have not taken up arms to achieve narrow and short-term political objectives. The majority of our people have not drugged, abducted and conscripted our children to kill their own kith and kin. Needless to say, the majority of our people also have basic human rights, including the right to security; the right to freedom from external aggression; the right to life; the right to live in peace.

Let us remind the United Nations Security Council and the international community at large, over and over again, that we have made concessions: far too many of our people, including thousands of our children, have already sacrificed their lives in our struggle for peace. Let us remind all those who advocate dialogue and the need for a political settlement that while RUF and its allies were trying to reduce our capital city to ashes, and while they were mutilating the survivors of their deadly invasion, your President took one of the greatest risks of his presidency by having a dialogue with the rebel leader, Foday Sankoh, face to face. That concession to peace was soon deflated by Sankoh himself and his comrades-in-arms.

Now, I ask you, how long can we go on making concessions when the rebels and their allies continue to respond by attacking, maiming and terrorizing our people? How long should we allow them to pursue their objective of shooting their way to power? How long should we allow RUF and its supporters to trample on the rights and lives of the vast majority of our people?

At this stage, and from now on, I wish to declare, on your behalf, that all calls for dialogue, and all calls for a political settlement should be directed at the RUF rebels who are waging a brutal and unnecessary war against the people of Sierra Leone, with massive material assistance from abroad. For a change, let RUF and its supporters make concessions - genuine concessions for peace - if they really want peace.

This is why today I would like to appeal to the United Nations Security Council, especially the permanent members who have the political and military means at their disposal, to exert pressure, first of all, on those States and individuals that continue to supply the weapons and logistics that are being

used to kill our people. It is no secret that without such external support RUF and its allies would not have had the capacity to maintain their military campaigns and wreak such havoc in several parts of the country.

Secondly, the Security Council, which has welcomed, more than once, the efforts made by my Government to resolve the conflict, should now focus its attention on the rebels. It is no longer enough for the Council to merely condemn their "continued campaign to terrorize the population of Sierra Leone, especially the atrocities committed against women and children". The atrocities have been horrendous. They have been going on for the past eight years.

Therefore, on your behalf, I urge the Security Council to now consider the possibility of taking further action, not excluding the threat of force, against the rebels and their supporters, in order to give effect to the Council's previous demands that they "cease all violence and seek genuine dialogue for the restoration of lasting peace and stability in Sierra Leone".

The Security Council should act before it is too late. The consequences of inaction or of continued lukewarm responses would be disastrous, not only for the people of Sierra Leone, but also for millions of their neighbours in the entire West African subregion.

Finally, let me reassure you that my Government is committed to peace and has gone out of its way to encourage a peaceful resolution of the conflict. You all know that since I became President, I have been committed to peace and reconciliation. However, we cannot simply surrender our rights and freedoms to those determined to achieve their objectives through terror. We have to ensure in the final analysis that the peace we achieve is sustainable and beneficial to every Sierra Leonean. Let us therefore have courage and take heart, for today's darkness and despair will be tomorrow's sunshine and joy. You have suffered long but, believe me, your suffering will soon be over.

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